

Message Text

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44-L

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 CU-04 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-14 OPR-02 SY-10 DRC-01 AID-20

PC-15 /178 W

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R 251144Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7706

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMCONSUL UDORN

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 16642

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: WHEITHER THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

REF: BANGKOK 16426

SUMMARY: THE STUDENT MOVEMENT IN THAILAND PRESENTLY DEVOL-
VES ON THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT), THE
LARGEST AND BEST ORGANIZED STUDENT GROUP. THE SANYA GOVERN-
MENT USED THE NSCT TO HELP QUELL THE VIOLENCE OF OCTOBER 14
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AND 15, AND IS PAYING MORE ATTENTION TO THE STUDENTS THAN PRE-

VIOUS GOVERNMENTS. THE NSCT APPEARS TO BE EXPANDING ITS ORGANIZATION TO INCLUDE VOCATIONAL, TECHNICAL, AND TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGE STUDENTS. FAR FROM PLAYING A "RED GUARD"ROLE, THE NSCT APPEARS TO BE DIRECTING ITS RESOURCES TOWARD EDUCATING THE PUBLIC FOR THE DEMOCRATIC RESPONSIBILITIES AHEAD. FRINGE GROUPS WITH MORE RADICAL GOALS EXIST. THEIR POPULAR AND STUDENT APPEAL IS LIMITED, BUT THEIR NUISANCE VALUE SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED. RECENT EXPERIENCE SUGGESTS THAT A CRUCIAL FACTOR TO THE SUCCESS OF STUDENT MOVEMENT IS PUBLIC SUPPORT, WITHOUT WHICH THE STUDENT MOVEMENT WOULD SUFFER THE SCORN OF ISOLATED RADICALISM. IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT WHETHER THE NSCT WILL MAINTAIN ITS CONSERVATIVE BENT BECAUSE THE OTHER FACTORS SHAPING THE NEW THAI POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT HAVE NOT FULLY SURFACED. END SUMMARY.

1. AFTER THE RECENT VIOLENCE, THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT) WORKED CLOSELY WITH THE SANYA GOVERNMENT TO CALM BANGKOK. THE FACT THAT VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE STUDENTS, AND NOT NECESSARILY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS UNDER NSCT DISCIPLINE, WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE VIOLENCE, COMPLICATED THE NSCT PEACEMAKER ROLE. THE SANYA GOVERNMENT ALSO USED THE NSCT, THE LARGEST AND BEST ORGANIZED STUDENT GROUP, TO RESTORE CERTAIN PUBLIC SERVICES SUCH AS TRAFFIC CONTROL. THE SANYA GOVERNMENT HAS SUBSEQUENTLY REMAINED IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH THE STUDENTS, AT LEAST PARTIALLY BECAUSE IT RECOGNIZES THAT THE THANOM GOVERNMENT COMPOUNDED ITS PROBLEMS BECAUSE IT WAS OUT OF TOUCH WITH THEM. THE SANYA GOVERNMENT, WHILE NOT NECESSARILY SOLICITING STUDENT COMMENTS, IS LISTENING TO THEM. LT. GEN. SAIYUD KERDPHOL, ROYAL THAI ARMY DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF, PLAYS A KEY LIAISON ROLE BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE NSCT. HE ALSO IS ACTIVELY WORKING TO MAINTAIN HARMONY WITHIN THE NSCT LEADERSHIP (REFTEL).

2. KING PHUMIPHON IS ALSO WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE NSCT LEADERSHIP. HE HAS HAD A NUMBER OF AUDIENCES, COLLECTIVELY AND INDIVIDUALLY, WITH STUDENT LEADERS TO EMPHASIZE HIS CONCERN THAT PEACE BE RESTORED AND THAT THAILAND MOVE TOWARD A NEW DEMOCRATIC FUTURE. THE KING CAN BE EXPECTED TO EXERT A RESTRAINING INFLUENCE ON THE STUDENTS, BUTTRESS THE MODERATE NSCT LEADERSHIP, AND TRY TO CONTAIN CENTRIFUGAL FORCES WITHIN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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STUDENT MOVEMENT.

3. THE NSCT IS THE PARAMOUNT STUDENT ORGANIZATION IN THAILAND. ITS LEADERS ARE PREPARING TO INCLUDE VOCATIONAL, TECHNICAL, AND TEACHER TRAINING STUDENTS WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION. SEKSAN PRA-SERTKUL, IF ANYONE CAN BE SAID TO HAVE BEEN ABLE TO EXERT CONTROL, WAS IN CHARGE OF THE OCTOBER 14 STREET DEMONSTRATIONS. HE HAS BEEN ELECTED AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THOSE THREE GROUPS OF STUDENTS.

DENTS ON THE NSCT EXECUTIVE COUNCIL. THEIR INCLUSION WILL SIGNIFICANTLY EXPAND NSCT INFLUENCE. HOWEVER, THE LEADERSHIP WILL PROBABLY HAVE PROBLEMS CONTROLLING THE VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL STUDENTS WHO ARE PROUD THAT THEY BORE THE BRUNT OF THE RECENT FIGHTING AND WHO GENERALLY COME FROM A DIFFERENT SOCIAL CLASS THAN THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.

4. THE NSCT PRESENTLY IS ACTIVELY INTERESTED IN STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC ERA. THE ONE REQUEST THE NSCT HAS MADE OF THE GOVERNMENT IS THAT THE RTG REORGANIZE THE PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT AND CONVERT IT INTO AN ORGAN TO EXPLAIN AND TEACH DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES TO THE POPULACE. FOR ITSELF, THE NSCT PLANS TO PUBLISH EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL ON DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS AND CONDUCT SEMINARS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY EXPLAINING DEMOCRACY. AS THESE PLANS COME TO FRUITION, THE NSCT MAY BOW TO INTERNAL PRESSURE TO DISENGAGE ITSELF FROM THE SEMI-OFFICIAL ROLE WHICH EVENTS THRUST UPON IT.

5. SOME THAI OBSERVERS EXPECT AND FEAR THAT THE STUDENTS WILL ASSUME A "RED GUARD" ROLE. THEIR IMMEDIATE CONCERN IS THAT THE NSCT WILL RELEASE A DOCUMENTED LIST OF CORRUPT OFFICIALS AND PRESSURES THE GOVERNMENT TO BRING THE OFFENDERS TO JUSTICE. UPOUNTRY STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS AND PAMPHLETEERS HAVE ALREADY CALLED FOR THE RESIGNATIONS OF THE GOVERNORS OF LAMPHAB, KKORAT, PITSANULOK, AND KHON KAEN PROVINCES. NEITHER THE NSCT, NOR ANY OTHER STUDENT GROUP, HAS SO FAR ASSOCIATED ITSELF WITH THESE DEMANDS.

6. THAI SOCIETY, HOWEVER, IS NOT PREPARED TO ALLOW A LEADING POLITICAL ROLE TO THE STUDENTS. A NUMBER OF THAI OBSERVERS AND EDITORIALISTS, WHILE PRAISING THE STUDENTS' COURAGE, HAVE CONTENDED THAT THE STUDENTS SHOULD GO BACK TO THEIR BOOKS. SOME THAI HAVE TOLD US THAT STRIDENT DEMANDS ON THE SANYA
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GOVERNMENT AND THE RESULTING CIVIL UNREST MAY BE THE PRETEXT FOR A MILITARY COUP. A NUMBER OF EDITORIALS HAVE STATED BALDLY THAT THE STUDENTS SHOULD END THEIR CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND RETURN TO BEING ONE OF A NUMBER OF PRESSURE GROUPS.

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7. A NUMBER OF SMALLER, MORE RADICAL STUDENT GROUPS HAS ALWAYS BEEN ON THE SCENE, BUT THE NSCT HAS CIRCUMSCRIBED THEIR INFLUENCE BY VIRTUE OF ITS MASIVE, SUPERIOR ORGANIZATION. THESE SMALLER GROUPS, HOWEVER, ARE NOT WITHOUT INFLUENCE. RADICAL GROUPS, SUCH AS THE SAPHA NA DOME (THE CAUCUS IN FRONT OF THE DOME), THE "SETTHATHAM" ORGANIZATION AND A THAMMASAT WOMENS' STUDENT GROUP, WERE THE FIRST TO REACT TO THE ARREST OF THE EARLY CONSTITUTION MOVEMENT PAMPHLETEERS AND PRESSURED FOR A DEMONSTRATION AT THAMMASAT. DURING THE RECENT UNREST, THE GOVERNMENT RADIO SINGLED OUT THE UNITED STUDENT AND PEOPLES FRONT, AS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE VIOLENCE OF OCTOBER 14. THIS GROUP HAS SUBSEQUENTLY RELEASED A HODGE-
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PODGE OF 19 DEMANDS, INCLUDING PUNISHING THE EXILED TRIO AND DISSOLVING THE APPOINTED NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY. ANOTHER GROUP, THE NATIONAL YOUTH COMMITTEE, SURFACED AFTER THE RIOTING AND ANNOUNCED THAT IT WILL WRITE LETTERS TO THE COUNTRIES WHERE

FORMER LEADERS FLED, REQUESTING THEIR EXTRADITION. THE INDONESIAN AMBASSADOR TOLD US HE HAS RECEIVED A LETTER FROM A GROUP CALLED THE THAI PATRIOTS THREATENING VIOLENCE IF INDONESIA GIVES ASYLUM TO THE FORMER THAI LEADERS. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE NSCT WILL LOSE SUPPORTERS TO THESE GROUPS IN THE DAYS AHEAD.

8. AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY IN THE STUDENT MOVEMENT IS THE ROLE THAT FORMER STUDENT LEADERS WILL PLAY. THIRAYUDH BOONMEE, FORMER NSCT SECRETARY-GENERAL, BECAME THE SPOKESMAN FOR THE EARLY CONSTITUTION MOVEMENT. HE IS PRESENTLY WORKING AS AN ADVISER TO THE NSCT IN ITS LIAISON ROLE WITH THE SANYA GOVERNMENT. AS THE NSCT TURNS TO OTHER PROJECTS HOWEVER, HE AND OTHER FORMER STUDENT LEADERS WILL HAVE TO REDEFINE THEIR ROLES. ANY OF THEIR POSSIBLE ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITY CHALLENGES THE EXISTING STUDENT GROUPS BECAUSE ALL WILL BE DRAWING FROM THE SAME POOL OF SUPPORTERS.

COMMENT: IF THE SANYA GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO MAINTAIN EFFECTIVE LIAISON WITH AND BOLSTERS THE PRESTIGE OF THE NSCT, THEN OTHER MORE RADICAL GROUPS WILL REMAIN ISOLATED. THE NSCT IS EMBARKING ON A FAIRLY CONSERVATIVE ROAD, STRESSING EDUCATIONAL MEASURES TO BUTTRESS THE DEVELOPING DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURE. IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT THE ULTIMATE DIRECTION OF THE THAI STUDENT MOVEMENT, BECAUSE OTHER VARIABLES WHICH WILL CONDITION THE ENVIRONMENT HAVE NOT YET SURFACED.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: STUDENT GROUPS, STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS, CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS, PUBLIC ATTITUDES, CENTRAL GOVERNMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 OCT 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973BANGKO16642
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: //////////////////////////////////////
Executive Order: GS UNGER
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19731013/aaaaajex.tel
Line Count: 251
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: BANGKOK 16426
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 NOV 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21-Nov-2001 by martinml>; APPROVED <26-Dec-2001 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: WHEITHER THE STUDENT MOVEMENT CINCPAC FOR POLAD
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005